

Town Administrator 2008 Annual Report

It is my pleasure to submit the Town Administrator's report for 2008.

This will be my fourth and final report as Town Administrator as I have accepted the position of Town Administrator in the Town of Hingham and will leave Ashburnham at the end of February 2009.

I arrived home mid-way through the year in July 2008 after completing a one-year deployment to Afghanistan with the Army's C. Co., 1st Bn. 20th Special Forces Group.

While stationed in Afghanistan my Team and I received a tremendous amount of support from the Ashburnham Firefighter's association led by Chief Zbikowski, as well as the Town Hall employees and many other wonderful citizens of Ashburnham like Gail Dumont and Mark Carlisle.

I will be forever grateful to all of those incredible people for their letters, e-mails and packages, each with their expressions of encouragement and support that meant so much to us during our challenging combat tour.

When I arrived home in July, the Firefighter's Association gave my family and me a wonderful cook-out celebration which was attended by dozens of elected and appointed officials, townspeople and my very wonderful fellow employees.

Again, my family and I will be forever grateful for that incredible night.

During that deployment, the need for improved medical facilities for the Afghan people became painfully obvious.

Chief Zbikowski, the Ashburnham Firefighter/EMT's, and regional Chiefs and Firefighters stepped up to the challenge and secured a used municipal ambulance. They stocked it with medical supplies and parts and had it shipped to Afghanistan late in 2008.

Just two weeks ago, the Chief and I travelled to Farah, Afghanistan to present the ambulance to the Afghan government officials and doctors of the Farah City hospital.

In so doing, the Chief and his department have brought great credit, of an international scale, upon Ashburnham.

As of this writing, a charitable foundation is being established to continue and expand this work and the Chief has already secured two more ambulances for the project.

The Town is most fortunate to have the leadership and compassion of Chief Zbikowski in command of the dedicated employees of the Ashburnham Fire & Rescue Department.

Since my return in July, my work has been focused nearly exclusively on restructuring the FY09 municipal budget, which had been approved at the ATM in May 2008 and which was out of balance by some \$800,000. Thanks to some visionary and creative work by the Town's Department Heads, we were able to reduce that budget by over \$400,000. The use of reserve

monies, and the generosity of Ashburnham's taxpayers who approved a tax levy override in the amount of \$250,000 closed the shortfall and balanced the town budget at a December 3, 2008 Special Town Meeting.

Unfortunately, the State cut Local Aid in January and estimated revenues on which the budget was predicted continued to decline, leaving the FY09 budget once again unbalanced by some \$300,000 by the end of February 2009. Work to balance the current year's budget continues as of this writing by Interim Town Administrator Norman Thidemann. His work will be aided by the hiring and spending freeze I put in place prior to my departure.

I was able to complete and submit a balanced FY10 budget in late January.

Thanks again to the Department Head's creativity, the FY10 budget was balanced with few service reductions to the public and only a single lay-off although several other positions were eliminated by attrition.

As I look back on my four years in Ashburnham, I can say that it has been a wonderful experience, and working with the Town's many excellent employees and elected/appointed officials, it was a busy and productive time.

I have been blessed to make many friendships and will value those for many years to come.

None of these is more important to me than that of my Assistant, Sylvia Turcotte. Syl is an asset of huge value to the Town, and her work is of the highest professional quality. She remained a trusted and loyal associate during all my years in Ashburnham, and I will miss the daily camaraderie we enjoyed working at Town Hall.

I will also miss the other Town Hall employees. They are a dedicated group of professionals and they serve the community with distinction.

Ashburnham's Department Heads are some of the finest managers with whom I have been associated in my many years of public service. Ashburnham's citizens should be proud and grateful for their leadership.

Lastly, my association with Ashburnham's elected and appointed volunteers has been a rich and rewarding experience. These dedicated citizens receive little or no compensation but work long and hard on behalf of the entire community. Ashburnham should be grateful for their dedicated service and love of their community.

I remain especially impressed with the Selectmen who hired me, Jonathan Dennehy, Mark Carlisle and Ron Reed. They are each outstanding public servants, and they exemplify the finest values that each citizen of Ashburnham may aspire to.....caring for family, and service and loyalty to their community and country. It was a privilege to work with them, and I thank them most sincerely to have been allowed to be of service to Ashburnham. I will miss it, and the people with whom I worked, dearly.

For your support and friendship, especially during my deployment, I say thank you and God bless.